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AVAF'S VERY ANXIOUS FEELING. TWO MEMBERS OF THE LOCONUTS PERFORMING IN THE ANNEX ROOM, JCP, MAY 2007.

words: Eric Schmalenberger

www.johnconnellypresents.com

www.peresprojects.com

Find out more about AVAF on their website at www.cheapcream.com

artwork: Courtesy of John Connelly Presents

"The ever-changing cast of characters toys with the public's perception of the group, blurring the lines of authorship and allowing the work to stand separately from any personality-driven opinions that the current art star environment might create."

Art collective Assume Vivid Astro Focus entered my world and *I saw the light*. With AVAF, I found a group that celebrated everything I had ever wanted out of an art experience: community, history, humor, freedom, performance, politics, and getting down and having a good time.

AVAF was formed in 2002 by one of the two core members, the other core member joined the group in 2005. For every project the group invites various collaborators to help create a new environment. The ever-changing cast of characters toys with the public's perception of the group, blurring the lines of authorship and allowing the work to stand separately from any personality driven opinions that the current art star environment might create. Incidentally, this practice of collaboration has built a community of like-minded artists and performers whose participation in the project gives them the opportunity to share in the expansive vision AVAF has always hoped to create.

Once given the label of "Neo Psychedelia", AVAF has now begun to prove itself to be more outside normal art world modes of definition than it was initially given credit. Far beyond just creators of colorful wall installations, the group has stretched its long arms into every and any media available to them. At once, they are installation artists, collectors, curators, music makers, performers, cultural remixers, historians, video artists, and cultural activists. There is no hierarchy of media in their practice, every puzzle piece counts and is given the same attention to detail. The ending result of this multimedia extravaganza are installations which completely surround the viewer, coming at them from every possible angle, bathing them in color, vision, light, and sound.

In the relatively short amount of time in which they have been present on the international art scene, AVAF have proven themselves to be sophisticated manipulators of the subject matters they present more and more with each project. For example, one can look at their constantly changing video program entitled *Butch Queen Realness With a Twist in Pastel Colors*. The BORWTPC video program has its roots in the group's obsession with collecting and sharing (in this case the collecting of rare video art and performance footage). Predating the Youtube craze, the program presents a constant stream of climactic and ecstatic moments from underground performances, nightlife, and work of leaders in the realm of video art. Each snippet lasts anywhere from one to seven minutes, representing only the most enthralling moments from the group's massive collection. With the rapid succession of fantastic and amazing work

being streamed at the audience, it's easy to lose track of time, and what seems like a few minutes can easily turn into an hour or more of viewing. These videos set a tone for the installation in which they are viewed; the group is openly and freely sharing its influences and passions and gives the audience a chance to be introduced to rare footage showcasing the roots of current nightlife and performance structures.

Outside the video program another key element to AVAF's installations is the inclusion of performance. In a recent conversation with one of the members, we spoke about how the artist desires for their projects not to be viewed as an *installation* but a *destination*, a place where one does not just look passively at the work but participates in it. For them the inclusion of the performer activates the space, bringing it alive, taking all the content and putting it on legs and "making it dance." At one of their most recent shows at John Connelly Presents, AVAF invited a host of downtown performers to take over one of the rooms in the gallery, which was built into a peepshow of sorts. Artists included Julie Atlas Muz, The Loconuts, Glenn Marla, Viva Ruiz, Machine Dazzle, Fancy Nancy, BARR, among others, and each was given a day in which to do as they pleased with the AVAF peepshow. The chance to give space to performers and allow them access to a fine art audience is an important mission which AVAF is proud to uphold. I, myself, got the chance to perform in the space with beloved art mother Bambi the Mermaid and realized first-hand the way in which performance can change and enliven the environments which AVAF creates by adding a sense of fun, humor, and freedom to the space and lightening everyone's mood (performance depending, of course). Either way, the addition of the live element does change the way one is receptive to the work. In a further exploration of that idea, a forthcoming exhibition at Deitch Projects will include the entire space being specifically designed to accommodate performances, screenings, and lectures, giving AVAF a unique opportunity to do their most ambitious performance-based work to date.

Through complete immersion in that which they love most, Assume Vivid Astro Focus gives us a view of reality which is entirely unique but completely plausible and (hopefully) desired. There is a reality that never denies imagination, a reality where the ego that is self-created is praised- not gawked at- and, most importantly, a world in which there is always room to dance, regardless of whether you're in a gallery, nightclub, or AVAF space.



INSTALLATION VIEW. MUSAC. LEON, SPAIN, SUMMER, 2006. ABOVE



BUT HER MAJESTY'S ROASTBEEF CURTAINS WOULDN'T OPEN FOR HIM. INSTALLATION VIEWS FROM THE EXHIBITION AT BLOW DE LA BARRA, AUGUST 2007

current diplomatic war between Russia and the UK, but the British Consulate in NY turned me down even with the invitation from the gallery and all the paperwork. Then, in June, I was invited to perform at Revisions of Excess festival in Birmingham, and they promised to take care of my paperwork. But there was a fuck-up in my work permit, which I knew nothing about, a wrong passport number or some shit, and I was detained by Her Majesty's Immigration Service at Luton airport. I was separated from Brian, forced to spend the night in a holding cell behind a two-way mirror, photographed, fingerprinted, interrogated like a criminal, and deported back to Berlin the following day. They even took my laces and belt away from me, just to make sure that I wouldn't kill myself! Brian wasn't allowed to stay with me so he continued to Birmingham and stayed in a fancy hotel that was booked for both of us. No one asked him for any work permits or visas just because he's American!

I was punished for being born in the wrong country and having a wrong passport. We were about to cancel our London show altogether but Pablo, our gallerist, insisted that we make a statement about what happened. Pablo is Mexican and he told me that in the past he's dealt with this kind of discrimination. For me it was a very traumatic experience and it gave our first London show a strong political edge. Brian went to London and installed the show together with our new assistant-collaborator from Slovenia Marko Brozic. *Her Majesty's Roastbeef Curtain Wouldn't Open for Him* was our reflection on the New World Order, where people like myself, natives of the countries outside the US and the EU, are being treated like second-class citizens. That's why we showed all the documents from my deportation case next to the portrait of the Queen mustached with SUPERM pubic hair.

What does SUPERM have cumming up?
S: A two month artist residency in India.